

RICHTER (H.E.)

No. II.



# HOW MAY WE PRESERVE OUR YOUTH ?

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size, each one telling the story of the time when it was young. All these fibres and cells have lapsed into a state of torpidity in the wood of the trunk, and thus every tree-like plant finds within itself the causes of its agedness. In the beginning there is sap and growth in every part of the plant, but when the plant has grown into a tree, the sap is consumed in the tips of the buds, and the surrounding layers of bark only. The outer bark, too, grows old. While it is young and green at first, it dies with the years, and the fresh-growing layers cause it to crack and gradually loosen itself from the tree. Thus the plant grows young again through new formations and by throwing off the old; thus it grows old by growing into wood.

In a like manner this process of rejuvenizing and ageing goes on in the animal kingdom. Here this state of torpidity does not show itself to the same degree, yet corals and their formation (owing their existence to former kinds of coral-animals) bear a strong resemblance to it. Again, we see other animal bodies undergoing a similar process; they gradually lapse into a state of torpidity while in their inmost core they are full of young life. Some of these species of animals are known not only to naturalists, but to everybody. Who does not know that the caterpillar loses its skin several times, until its outer cover has grown so hard that it can no longer peel off, but continues to exist as the pupa, which later on breaks open to let out the butterfly? A similar process is witnessed, when we see the snake grow more and more torpid, until it hides in its hole, assumes a medley color and grows blind, until at last it begins to strip off its skin, and then we have the same snake fresh and full of new life. Thus the whole animal kingdom casts off the shell and skin. The bird loses its feathers, the deer sheds its horns, the crab its shell, and in each instance the act is followed by an age of fresh strength and new vitality.

I could cite many other like instances, but let this suffice. Now, then, all this teaches us that the essentiality of rejuvenescence may be amassed up as follows: 1, secretion and casting off of what has been absorbed and consumed; 2, taking up new nourishment, and 3, a natural automatic movement of all saps and vital powers of the organism. This, then, pertains to what we call growing young again. This is the essentiality of youth in both the animal and vegetable kingdoms. In the human organism this process of rejuvenescence passes off so quietly as to be unnoticed. Casting off the wasted integuments and substituting the new for the old (the cuticle, for instance) goes so much quicker with children than the rejuvenizing process with birds and snakes; hence the necessity of frequent bathing and washing of children. With age the human skin grows dull and dry—the active peeling off of the skin stops. We observe a like proceeding in the mucous membranes, there is a continual discharge and a continual new growth of cells. But this, too, ceases when we grow older and is the cause of the most severe cases of sickness in old age. We find these three proceedings in every organ essentially necessary to our subsistence, as also in the fluids that circulate in our system. Here, too, we find an uninterrupted formation of the new and a continual consumption of the old. Hundreds of the peculiar, little corpuscles, which constitute the fluids

of the human body, especially the blood, are uninterruptedly destroyed, and new ones form incessantly, so long as we are healthy and strong. This constant consuming and replenishing of the life-fluids goes on day and night, with every beat of the heart and with every breath we draw. This incessant, automatic action of the nervous and muscular system is kept up as long as we live. But here, too, we find a contrast between youth and age; in the former, an active absorption and repletion of matter, fiery, red blood and quick breathing; in the latter, sluggish blood and slow breathing. The child, when sick, loses flesh and color rapidly, but recovers just as quickly, while older persons do not show the effects of sickness so quickly, but feel them longer.

We find the same contrast mentally. The child shows a freshness of perception, an unsatiable curiosity and desire for knowledge, it constantly has new ideas and learns and forgets quickly, while old age grows more and more indifferent to the outer world, is unwilling to hear of any innovations and clings tenaciously to the old ideas, imbibed in the days of childhood. The child or youth, when not sleepy, is constantly employed, has new ideas with every hour, plays first at this, then, that, fidgets from morn till night and delights in physical exercise, while the old man moves slowly and carefully, manifests a strong desire for mental and bodily rest, and objects to all exertion not absolutely necessary.

We have now learned what constitutes the essentiality of youth, hence have partially answered our question. The answer to the question, how may we preserve our youth? should not be difficult to find, after carefully perusing the above.

We may keep ourselves physically young by taking new nourishment as fast and as much as is necessary to restore the consumed vitalities. The cuticle is rejuvenated by frequent washing, bathing and rubbing; the mucous membranes are kept in a healthy condition by regular secretion; the blood-generating organs by keeping them in constant activity, especially by the furtherance of deep, heavy breathing, which puts new blood into the veins, and by an active circulation of the vital fluids through heart and veins. The muscles must be exercised daily that they consume themselves and thus draw new material from the blood and change it into flesh. People who take no exercise, persons of sedentary habits grow old quickly. Whatever is inductive of torpidness must be avoided; whatever keeps the limbs active and limber must be encouraged, if we wish to remain young.

We may retain our mental youth by germinating and promoting the above mentioned properties of the mind, by keeping our memory fresh and training our mind to take up new material from a sensual, intellectual, and social point of view. An open heart, an honest mind, are as essential to youth as breathing is. It would be foolish to underestimate either. The senses should have fresh impressions; each sense should be cultivated and kept ready to receive the impressions of the outer world.

We should also cultivate those mental faculties that are necessary in removing absorbed matter. This is done by carefully discerning between the good and the bad, the reasonable and the unreasonable, and

by trying to forget everything that does not serve as wholesome food for the mind. The faculty of forgetting old affairs settled long ago, is one of the most important factors in keeping the mind young; and this may be acquired by a discharge of thoughts, by exchanging ideas with others, by relieving the mind by confiding in others, etc. First of all, however, we must cultivate and further the one acquirement, which we have seen to be essential to the conception of youth: self-incitation and self-action. To do which is one of the most difficult problems man has to solve. Our worst enemy, the one pre-eminently the cause of premature old age, is idleness. But few persons possess the rare faculty of being mentally busy at all times and never to be idle. Where the mind is uninterruptedly actively employed it is well able to rid itself of the old, sad remembrances and idle thoughts. Mental activity alone prevents us from a withered mind, which is equivalent to old age. When we are unwilling to have past ideas of ours undergo rigid examination, when we tenaciously cling to old customs and comforts, when we will hear of no other ideas but our own, when we scorn to accept the new ideas that science teaches, then we may know that all this means nothing less than that old age is overtaking us.

But here the reader may ask : What brings up this topic ? Well, as we began without preface, we will close with a few explanatory remarks. What we have said has all been said in praise of one of the many opportunities gymnastic art offers us, to keep body and mind young, as even as regarded from a scientific standpoint by the naturalists and physicians. Physical culture is the most essential and effective means of preserving youth in existence. The reader has, no doubt, often heard and read of the medicinal importance of physical culture and of its influence on mind and body, hence we may save ourselves the trouble of repeating this. Only those who take gymnastic exercise know the great benefit of strong, well-devoted limbs, and of deep, healthy breathing, only they know how gymnastic exercise promotes the power of gaining new vitality, how it causes the blood to circulate more rapidly through our veins ; how it increases the appetite and aids digestion in keeping the bowels open ; how it produces a healthy sleep, which we all know to be most important in preserving health and life. Gymnastic exercise stimulates to activity and increases youthful delight in the exercise of strength. And this accounts for the strange transformations which gymnastic exercise will produce in the appearance, carriage and actions of people. Experience is my authority for this statement. And yet people ask : Is gymnastic exercise really a means of keeping young ? Certainly not one of those will hesitate to answer this question with an emphatic "Yes" who some years ago, saw these peevish, sickly-looking persons received as new members into our gymnastic society, and who see those same men in our midst to-day, so changed that they are hardly able to recognize them, for their looks, their complexion, their whole bearing, their mental activity even, makes them appear at least from ten to twenty years younger. Would that we could show the reader some of our members in their former and present state, that he might judge for himself what regular gymnastic exercise has done towards rejuvenizing

them. Of course this is impossible, but if you will visit our gymnasias regularly, for but one year, you may convince yourself as to the truth of these facts, with your own eyes.

Not only the body, but the mind, too, is made and kept young by gymnastic exercise. By regular physical exercise we make the mind lord of the body and create a firmness of character. At the present time one-sided, individual education is in vogue; to sit in the room all day, to rack one's brain, to read and write, to take up strange ideas, to investigate old, antiquated things ; that is the tendency of the present educational system. And right here the importance of gymnastic societies should make itself felt, for they offer us ample opportunity of becoming men of whom it may be said: "*Mens sana in corpore sano.*"

If we have shown that regular gymnastic exercise is conducive of health, and is a main factor in preserving both body and mind in a healthy condition, or, as we called it before, to preserve our youth, we have gained our object. We could go further, but must not abuse the reader's patience ; hence we close with the earnest wish that our humble efforts may add a large number of new members to our "gymnastic-rejuvenating" societies.

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